European Commission – Irish Public Health (Alcohol) Bill 2015

Written evidence from Cancer Research UK

**About Cancer Research UK[[1]](#endnote-1)**

1. Cancer Research UK is the world’s leading cancer charity dedicated to saving lives through research. The charity’s pioneering work has been at the heart of the progress that has already seen survival rates in the UK double in the last forty years. In 2015/16, we spent £432 million on research in institutes, hospitals and universities across the UK, funding over 4,000 researchers, clinicians and nurses. We receive no funding from the Government for our research. Our ambition is to see three in four patients survive cancer by 2034.
2. The charity’s in-house Cancer Policy Research Centre (CPRC) undertakes research that can be translated into cancer prevention policy recommendations. The centre has published several studies identifying effective measures for preventing not only cancer, but also other alcohol attributable harms to society.

**Introduction**

1. We welcome the opportunity to submit written evidence to the European Commission’s consultation on the Republic of Ireland’s Public Health (Alcohol) Bill 2015, which explores provisions within the Bill relating to labelling, advertising and a broadcast watershed.
2. We believe that Republic of Ireland’s Public Health (Alcohol) Bill 2015 is progressive legislation that contains positive steps to make clear the direct link between alcohol consumption and fatal cancers to the public. The evidence base clearly supports this link, and it is important that the public is aware of this so they can make informed choices about what they consume.

**Link between alcohol and cancer**

1. Alcohol is a major risk factor for cancer. It has been classified by the International Agency for Research into Cancer (IARC; part of the World Health Organisation) as a Group 1 carcinogen since 1988.[[2]](#endnote-2) [[3]](#endnote-3) IARC's rulings are the gold standard in terms of determining if something causes cancer, and Group 1 is their highest risk category. This means that there is convincing evidence that alcohol causes cancer in humans. More recent reviews by IARC and other agencies have also concluded that drinking alcohol causes cancer.[[4]](#endnote-4) [[5]](#endnote-5) [[6]](#endnote-6) [[7]](#endnote-7)
2. A study published in 2018 found that drinking too much alcohol causes 3% of cancer cases in the UK, around 11,900 cases each year.[[8]](#endnote-8) [[9]](#endnote-9) The proportion of cases down to alcohol was highest for mouth and upper throat (pharynx) cancers (more than a third), but breast cancer accounted for the greatest overall number of cases linked to alcohol (around 4,400 cases each year).[[10]](#endnote-10)
3. The risk of alcohol-related cancers increases the more you drink.[[11]](#endnote-11) So by cutting down on what you drink, you could reduce the risk of these cancers. It is never too late for moderate or heavy drinkers to reduce their consumption. Evidence suggests that the risk of mouth, throat and oesophageal (food pipe) cancers reduces over time in people who have given up drinking, compared to those who continue.[[12]](#endnote-12) [[13]](#endnote-13)

**Impact of excessive alcohol consumption**

1. Alcohol consumption has a sizeable impact on health services. For example, in England the estimated direct costs of alcohol to the NHS is £3.5 billion each year.[[14]](#endnote-14) There are over one million alcohol-related hospital admissions in England each year,[[15]](#endnote-15) with 70% of A&E attendances at weekends related to alcohol.[[16]](#endnote-16)
2. Alcohol is also implicated in a wide range of social problems, particularly crime and workplace absences. In combination, these health and social problems impose a substantial burden on public services and the wider economy. The UK Government estimates that the total cost of alcohol-related harm in England and Wales is £21 billion per year.[[17]](#endnote-17)

1. Registered charity in England and Wales (1089464), Scotland (SC041666) and the Isle of Man (1103). Registered as a company limited by guarantee in England & Wales No.4325234. Registered address: Angel Building, 407 St John Street, London EC1V 4AD [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. International Agency for Research on Cancer (1988) Alcohol drinking: *IARC Monographs on the Evaluation of Carcinogenic Risks to Humans.*Vol 44 ([website](http://monographs.iarc.fr/ENG/Monographs/vol44/index.php)) [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. International Agency for Research on Cancer (2012) Consumption of alcoholic beverages. *IARC Monogr Eval Carcinog Risks to Humans*. 2012;100E [(pdf)](http://monographs.iarc.fr/ENG/Monographs/vol100E/mono100E-11.pdf) [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
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5. World Health Organization (2014). Global status report on alcohol and health 2014. 2014. ([website](http://www.who.int/substance_abuse/publications/global_alcohol_report/en/)) [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. World Health Organization (2014). World Cancer Report. *IARC Press*. 2014. ([website](http://publications.iarc.fr/Non-Series-Publications/World-Cancer-Reports/World-Cancer-Report-2014)) [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Department of Health. (2016) Alcohol Guidelines Review – Report from the Guidelines development group to the UK Chief Medical Officers. ([pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/545739/GDG_report-Jan2016.pdf)) [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Brown, K. et al. (2018) The fraction of cancer attributable to modifiable risk factors in England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom in 2015. British Journal of Cancer ([website](https://www.nature.com/articles/s41416-018-0029-6)) [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
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14. Home Office (2012) A Minimum Unit Price for Alcohol Impact Assessment ([pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/.../ia-minimum-unit-pricing.pdf)) [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. NHS Digital (2017) Statistics on Alcohol ([pdf](http://digital.nhs.uk/media/30886/Statistics-on-Alcohol-England-2017-Report/Any/alc-eng-2017-rep)) [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
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17. Home Office (2012) A Minimum Unit Price for Alcohol Impact Assessment. London: Home Office ([pdf](http://www.ias.org.uk/uploads/pdf/In%20the%20Workplace/ia-minimum-unit-pricing.pdf)) [↑](#endnote-ref-17)